



April 20, 2011

The Honorable Christine O. Gregoire,
Governor of Washington State
PO Box 40002
Olympia, WA

RE: Ecology and Puget Sound Partnership Report
“Improving Oil Spill Prevention and Response in Washington State --
Lessons Learned from the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill”

Dear Governor Gregoire:

We appreciate the opportunity to review President Obama’s National Commission (Commission) Report on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill. Today marks the one-year anniversary of that spill in the Gulf of Mexico. The day after the Commission’s Report was issued (January 11, 2011), you directed us to evaluate it to determine how these recommendations may apply in our state. Enclosed for your consideration is our report entitled: *“Improving Oil Spill Prevention and Response in Washington State - Lessons Learned from the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill.”*

We want to thank you for your leadership over the years on oil spill issues. In 1989, you provided Ecology’s Spills Program with an enduring legacy when you established the Pacific States/ British Columbia Oil Spill Task Force. That organization has worked on lessons learned from the *Nestucca* and *Exxon Valdez* oil spill and on every major West Coast incident since. The Task Force remains an important mechanism helping our state, federal and Canadian partners maintain strong ties and create a shared learning environment throughout the region.

The Deepwater Horizon disaster sadly generated additional hard lessons about the complexity and risk involved with oil spills. Here in Washington State, while we enjoy a relatively good spill record, we know too well the inherent risk associated with having over 15 billion gallons of oil transferred around our state every year. Similar to the Gulf region, Washington’s economy is heavily dependent on the marine environment. Our top priority is ensuring that our prevention measures are effective and minimize the risks of catastrophic spills from impacting our economy, environment and way of life. We further appreciate your direction to take full advantage of the Gulf spill lessons learned and apply them in our state.

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The recent earthquake in Japan is another reminder of the importance of disaster preparedness. While most natural disasters cannot be prevented, oil spills are preventable. As our natural resources continue to increase in economic value to our state, oil spill preparedness will require thoughtful, steady and continuous improvement. Our response systems should provide the best achievable protection from damage caused by large spills.

In reviewing the Commission's Report, it was not a surprise that many of the recommendations address issues for which we have long seen gaps in the response system here in Washington State. The recent work done by the Puget Sound Partnership's Oil Spill Work Group (see Appendix 1 of the enclosed report) also identified some of these same common themes.

The Commission's Report's most significant finding was what we all expected...the Gulf oil spill disaster was preventable. The report identified several key recommendations to remedy gaps in the system, both in terms of improving corporate safety cultures and improving regulatory oversight to prevent future disasters.

The Commission's Report identified and grouped seven distinct areas of critical issues. Our report focuses on three of those critical issues as having relevance to Washington State:

- Improving safety of offshore operations
- Strengthening oil spill response, planning and capacity
- Ensuring financial responsibility

Our report identifies gaps and strengths that exist in these critical areas and provides recommendations for how the system can be improved to prevent a major or catastrophic spill. These recommendations provide an opportunity to take action now to ensure our state is better positioned to maintain a high level of vigilance in our efforts to strengthen the oil spill prevention, preparedness and response system.

Thank you for your strong leadership on oil spill prevention, preparedness and response work over the past two decades. We look forward to your feedback on the enclosed report.



Ted Sturdevant, Director
Washington State Department of Ecology



Gerry O'Keefe, Executive Director
Puget Sound Partnership

Enclosure: Report entitled: *"Improving Oil Spill Prevention and Response in Washington State - Lessons Learned from the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill"*

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